

# 1. Plan Summary

Mashpee's historic roots are those of the Wampanoag people, whose respect for the earth they inhabit has been adopted by many of those who have come to share this place with them. Among the many ways that respect has been exhibited has been a long-term and multi-faceted program of land acquisition and preservation undertaken by Town officials and others with broad support from the community.

During the 1970s, efforts were begun to protect the Mashpee River corridor, the physical heart of our landscape. Those efforts succeeded spectacularly, with state and federal assistance, during the 1980s. At the same time, an even longer-term effort to preserve the beaches, dunes and coastal ponds of South Cape Beach, begun in the early 60s, came to fruition during the 1980s with the establishment of South Cape Beach State Park as well as the designation of the Waquoit Bay Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) and creation of the Waquoit Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (WBNERR). Johns Pond Park was purchased in the early 80s, with state Self-Help Program funding assistance, while throughout the decade the Town also managed to set aside a wide variety of conservation lands through purchases, set asides of existing Town lands, donations, trades and creative land planning and zoning techniques.

Entering the 90s, the Town found itself beset by problems stemming from the most rapid population growth in New England, which limited its ability to make large fiscal commitments to land acquisition. At the same time the community, led by the Board of Selectmen, came to realize more than ever the value of the lands that had been set aside. Those lands not only represented growth-related problems foregone and natural resources protected, but also came more and more to define the character of the community and to provide the key to a healthy and sustainable local economy based on quality of life, outdoor recreation opportunities and "green" tourism.

For many years the Town had worked cooperatively with a wide range of state agencies, land trusts and other groups on a variety of land preservation and natural resource protection efforts. Each found that its own resources were too limited to achieve its goals, particularly given the economic downturn that plagued the early part of the 90s. That growing realization crystallized when the Town, assisted by our Congressman and Senators, joined with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to create a unique new National Wildlife Refuge. Consolidating and building on many years of work and over 2000 acres of land previously preserved by local and state agencies and organizations, the Refuge was based on a cooperative management agreement among eight town, state and non-profit organizations and the federal government, rather than on singular purchase and ownership by the Fish & Wildlife Service. With broad-based support from the communities of Mashpee and Falmouth and endorsement by many Cape Cod organizations and the state, the Mashpee NWR was approved by Congress and the Fish & Wildlife Service and formally established on April 19, 1995 with the ceremonial signing of a formal Memorandum of Understanding among the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the Mass. Dept. of Environmental Management / Waquoit Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, the Mass. Division of Fisheries & Wildlife, the Town of Mashpee and its Conservation Commission, The Town of Falmouth and its Conservation Commission, the Falmouth Rod & Gun Club, Inc., The Orenda

## Wildlife Land Trust and the Mashpee Wampanoag Indian Tribal Council.

At the same time the refuge was being established, another opportunity was created for cooperation in conservation and outdoor recreation efforts with the county and our fellow Cape Cod towns. The County Commissioners initiated the Cape Cod Pathways project, a proposed network of green spaces and recreational trails throughout the Cape. In April, 1995, Mashpee had the honor of creating and formally dedicating the first link in the Cape Cod Pathways network as part of its commemoration of its 125th anniversary as a town. In addition, Mashpee joined Sandwich in a County-funded consultant study for a “Cross-Cape Trail” from Sandy Neck on Cape Cod Bay to South Cape Beach on Vineyard Sound. The “Feasibility Report for the Cross Cape Trail was prepared by Abbelire Inc. in October, 1995 under contract to the Town of Sandwich. Along with a number of fairly exotic concepts, particularly in the area of Route 6 in Sandwich, the study laid out both permanent and short-term alignments for the trail, along with secondary trail loops and certain trailside amenities. Large segments of the trail have been established in Mashpee, although less progress has been made on the Sandwich portion.

In November, 1998, the Town of Mashpee voted to join the Cape Cod Land Bank, for which a 3% property tax surcharge was approved by Town Meeting. Between 1998 and 2005, more than 516 acres were purchased by the Town under the auspices of the Land Bank (of which 182 acres were purchased jointly with the Town of Barnstable), with over \$13 million appropriated by the Town to fund the purchases. Twenty properties, just over 110 acres, were placed under the care and custody of the Conservation Commission. Eight parcels, with 406 acres, were retained under the control of the Board of Selectmen, including 186 acres in Mashpee included in the Santuit Pond Preserve, purchased and jointly owned with the Town of Barnstable (an additional 80+ acres lies in Barnstable) with funding assistance from, and subject to a Conservation Restriction held by, the Mass. Division of Fisheries & Wildlife.

In May 2005, Mashpee voters approved conversion from the Land Bank to the Community Preservation Act (CPA) under the provisions of Chapter 149 §298 of the Acts of 2004. Under the provisions of the Act, the Town’s Land Bank Fund reverts to a new Community Preservation Fund, at least 10% of which must be used to fund affordable housing, 10% for historic preservation projects and 10% for open space. A new Community Preservation Committee was established in August 2005 to determine, along with Town Meeting how the remaining 70% of CPA funding will be distributed and to make recommendations on specific spending proposals. Under the Act, the Town’s 3% property tax surcharge will be matched by the state from Registry of Deeds revenues, providing an additional funding stream for open space and recreation purchases. At the time of this update, no land purchases had been completed with CPA funds, although one purchase of approximately 15 acres adjacent to the Santuit Pond Preserve had been approved..

Given these major changes in the Town’s existing open space acreage and the new funding mechanisms made available by the Community Preservation Act, along with the fact that almost all the open space purchases recommended in the previous 1998 update of the plan have been accomplished, this plan update is a necessity to help guide the Conservation Commission and Community Preservation Committee in their work. The guidelines established in the 2001 update of the Commonwealth’s “Open Space Planner’s Workbook” were followed. The plan

begins by spelling out our purposes for planning and by describing how the plan was developed. Section 3 provides a description of the town's history, regional setting and development patterns. The largest portion of the plan is the Section 4 inventory and analysis of Mashpee's natural resources, from geology through soils, water resources, vegetation and wildlife to a description of some of our unique resources and problems. As no other natural history of the town exists, that section is intended to serve as an ongoing educational resource beyond its service here. Existing conservation and recreation lands are then inventoried in Section 5, along with other lands of conservation and recreation interest. A description of the Town's vision and goal setting process in Section 6 is followed by Section 7's analysis of our resource protection and community needs. The plan concludes with its key elements, our statement of long-term goals and objectives in Section 8 and Section 9's five-year action plan outlining proposed activities in the short term. Sections 10 and 11 include public and board / agency comments and references to sources cited.

Our long-term goals and objectives focus on preserving open space to protect wildlife habitat and natural resources and providing a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities, enhancing agricultural activities, restoring and preserving wetlands and water quality and enhancing coastal access. Suggested five-year actions focus on six key areas: completing land acquisition within the Mashpee National Wildlife Refuge's Congressionally authorized boundaries, acquiring "infill" parcels within existing conservation areas, continuing development of the Cross-Cape trail, continuing development of other facilities at Town conservation areas, upgrading and expanding the Town's active recreation facilities and reducing potential traffic and water quality impacts from new development through acquisition of key parcels and open space restrictions. Ongoing management of existing lands will also focus on wildlife habitat enhancement, reduction of illegal trash dumping and control of illegal ATV use and related property damage.

Mashpee has been extraordinarily successful and fortunate in its efforts over the years to protect its open spaces and to maintain its quality of life. More than 2360 acres of open space have been set aside by the Town, with another 1891 acres of protected open space owned by the state, federal government and land trusts, 177 acres protected as public well sites, and over 1390 acres protected through conservation restrictions or set aside as open space under zoning regulations. At the same time we have been beset by many problems, environmental and otherwise, associated with our rapid growth, most seriously in the areas of water quality in our bays and traffic on our roadways. Enactment of this plan update will not guarantee continuation of that success or resolve all of our problems. It can only serve as a guidebook as we attempt to deal with the opportunities and challenges that continue to come our way. As it has in the past, the rest will depend ultimately on wise leadership and the hard work and dedication of a lot of good people.